

# We are IntechOpen, the world's leading publisher of Open Access books Built by scientists, for scientists

4,800

Open access books available

122,000

International authors and editors

135M

Downloads

Our authors are among the

154

Countries delivered to

TOP 1%

most cited scientists

12.2%

Contributors from top 500 universities



WEB OF SCIENCE™

Selection of our books indexed in the Book Citation Index  
in Web of Science™ Core Collection (BKCI)

Interested in publishing with us?  
Contact [book.department@intechopen.com](mailto:book.department@intechopen.com)

Numbers displayed above are based on latest data collected.  
For more information visit [www.intechopen.com](http://www.intechopen.com)



# Characterization of Plant Antioxidative System in Response to Abiotic Stresses: A Focus on Heavy Metal Toxicity

Miguel Mourato, Rafaela Reis and Luisa Louro Martins  
*UIQA, Instituto Superior de Agronomia, Technical University of Lisbon, Lisbon  
 Portugal*

## 1. Introduction

During their life span, plants can be subjected to a number of abiotic stresses, like drought, temperature (both high and low), radiation, salinity, soil pH, heavy metals, lack of essential nutrients, air pollutants, etc. When affected by one, or a combination of abiotic stresses, a response is induced by changes in the plant metabolism, growth and general development.

Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS) are a natural consequence of the aerobic metabolism, and plants have mechanisms to deal with them in normal conditions, controlling the formation and removal rates. Under stress conditions, cell homeostasis is disrupted and ROS production can increase a lot putting a heavy burden on the those antioxidative mechanisms, some of which are activated in order to eliminate the excess ROS (Mittler et al., 2004).

Trace element contamination cause abiotic stress in plants and it can affect crop production and quality. Certain metals, like copper, are essential for plants, but at high concentrations (depending on plant species) can be considered toxic. Other elements like cadmium and arsenic (a metalloid), while not essential elements for plants, are widespread pollutants that are present in nature due to both natural and manmade activities.

Plants have developed different strategies to cope with these stresses. Some use an avoidance strategy to reduce trace element assimilation while others use internal defence mechanisms to cope with the increasing levels of the toxic species. Phytotoxic amounts of trace elements are known to affect several physiological processes and can cause oxidative stress. Plants have developed several trace element defence mechanisms, that allow them to grow despite the presence of variable concentrations of trace elements, but the threshold concentrations as well as the different response mechanisms strongly depend on plant species and on the type of metal. Metal toxicity can cause a redox imbalance and induce the increase of ROS concentration, activating the antioxidant defence mechanisms of plants (Sharma & Dietz, 2009). These mechanisms are very dependent on the metal and the plant but usually include the involvement of the ascorbate-glutathione cycle enzymes which is a major antioxidative defence mechanism, and of other antioxidant enzymes like catalase, peroxidases, and superoxide dismutase. Other non-enzymatic substances with reported antioxidant properties can also be involved in plant defence mechanisms, like ascorbate, glutathione, alkaloids, phenolic compounds, non-proteic amino-acids and carotenoids.

## 2. Oxidative stress and ROS production

ROS are produced by all aerobic organisms and are usually kept in balance by the antioxidative mechanisms that exist in all living beings. Because ROS have an important signalling role in plants (Foyer & Noctor, 2003; Vranova et al., 2002), their concentration must be carefully controlled through adequate pathways (Mittler, 2002). ROS can be formed during normal aerobic metabolic processes like photosynthesis and respiration and thus, the majority of ROS are produced in the mitochondria, chloroplast, peroxisomes, plasma membrane and apoplast (Ahmad et al., 2008; Moller, 2001). Other sources of ROS production are NADPH oxidases, amine oxidases and cell-wall peroxidases (Mittler, 2002).

Under certain stress conditions (like excess light, cold, heat, drought, heavy metals etc.) the production of ROS can exceed the capacity of the plant's defence mechanisms, an imbalance in intracellular ROS content is established and this results in oxidative stress (Gill & Tuteja, 2010). Thus, oxidative stress can be defined as the physiological changes resulting from the formation of excess quantities of reactive oxygen species (ROS) (Vangronsveld & Clijsters, 1994). This increase in ROS levels induces a metabolic response in the plant in order to eliminate them. This metabolic response is highly dependent on the plant species, plant growing state and the type and duration of the stress.

Heavy metals<sup>1</sup> are natural elements that are present at different concentrations throughout nature, but whose levels can increase and overtake the toxicity threshold of living beings due to both natural and anthropogenic causes (Sánchez, 2008). As plants must adapt (or die) to the conditions where they grow, the presence of heavy metals can induce oxidative stress and the activation of several defence factors in the plants (Prasad, 2004). It is important to understand how some plants can cope with high concentration of metals in order to produce crops able to grow on contaminated soils (Schröder et al., 2008), to help in environmental cleanup via phytoremediation (Adriano et al., 2004) and to breed plants with higher contents of essential nutrients (Zhao & McGrath, 2009).

### 2.1 Types of ROS

Molecular oxygen ( $O_2$ ) is in itself a bi-radical<sup>2</sup>, as it has two unpaired electrons that have parallel spins (Halliwell, 2006). The ground state of the oxygen molecule is the triplet oxygen ( $^3O_2$  or  $\cdot O-O\cdot$ ), because this is an energetically more favourable state. Due to this electron configuration, it doesn't react easily with organic molecules that have paired electrons with opposite spins. Thus, in order for oxygen to react, it must be activated (Garg & Manchanda, 2009). If the oxygen molecule in its ground state absorbs sufficient energy, the spin of one of the unpaired electrons can be reversed forming singlet oxygen, that can readily react with organic molecules. This can happen during photosynthesis when an excess of light energy cannot be readily dissipated by the photosynthetic machinery (Foyer et al., 1994).

---

<sup>1</sup> Although the term "heavy metal" can be misleading because it includes a whole range of substances some of which do not conform to the more usual chemical definitions of the term, we use it in this text in its environmental context, where it includes metals that are a cause of pollution concern. Other authors sometimes use the expression "trace elements" in this context, although this definition also has problems on its own.

<sup>2</sup> Radicals are usually highly unstable, and thus very reactive, species that have one or more unpaired electrons.

Another form of activation is by partial reduction adding one, two or three electrons giving rise to the superoxide radical, hydrogen peroxide and hydroxyl radical, respectively (Mittler, 2002). The complete reduction of oxygen (adding four electrons) results in water, which is the normal reduction of oxygen that occurs in the mitochondrial electron transport chain, catalyzed by cytochrome oxidase. As such, this type of activation can occur in metabolic pathways that involve an electron transport chain and can thus occur in several cell locations (Alscher et al., 2002).

In Table 1 we present the most important types of ROS. They can be free radicals or non-radicals.

Name	Structure	Type	Relative Reactivity
Singlet oxygen	$^1\text{O}_2$ (O-O:)	Radical	High
Superoxide	$\text{O}_2^{\bullet-}$ ( $\cdot\text{O}-\text{O}:$ )	Radical	Medium
Hydrogen peroxide	$\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ (H:O-O:H)	Non-radical	Low
Hydroxyl radical	$\text{HO}^\bullet$ (H:O $\cdot$ )	Radical	Very high

Table 1. Most important types of ROS

Singlet oxygen is mainly produced in the chloroplasts at photosystem II (Asada, 2006) but may also result from lipoxygenase activity and is a highly reactive species that can last for nearly 4  $\mu\text{s}$  in water (Foyer et al., 1994).  $^1\text{O}_2$  reactivity has as preferred target the conjugated double bonds present on polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) leaving a specific footprint in the cell (Moller et al. 2007) that can be followed by the detection of several aldehydes like malondialdehyde (MDA) formed by PUFA peroxidation.

The superoxide radical is mainly produced both in the chloroplasts (photosystems I and II) and mitochondria as sub products and in peroxisomes (del Rio et al., 2006; Moller et al., 2007; Rhoads et al., 2006), has a half-life of 2-4  $\mu\text{s}$  and cannot cross phospholipid membranes (Garg & Manchanda, 2009) and so it is important that the cell has adequate *in situ* mechanism to scavenge this ROS. Superoxide dismutase can catalyse the conversion of this species into hydrogen peroxide. Superoxide radical can also be produced by NADPH oxidase in the plasma membrane (Moller et al. 2007).

Hydrogen peroxide is mainly produced in peroxisomes (del Rio et al., 2006) and also in mitochondria (Rhoads et al., 2006), and also results from the dismutation of superoxide. It is not a radical and can easily cross membranes diffusing across the cell and has a half-life of around 1 ms (Garg & Manchanda, 2009).

The hydroxyl radical, the most reactive of the species listed in Table 1, can be formed from hydrogen peroxide via Fenton and Fenton-like reactions (catalyzed by iron or other transition metals) and, unlike the previous two ROS mentioned, there are no known enzymatic systems able to degrade it (Freinbichler et al., 2011).

Although the superoxide radical and hydrogen peroxide are not as reactive as other species they are produced in large amounts in the cell and can initiate other reactions that lead to more dangerous species (Noctor & Foyer, 1998). In fact, superoxide radical can be converted by specific enzymes into hydrogen peroxide, and this can also be a problem as it cause the occurrence of Fenton reactions (Moller et al., 2007).

Heavy metals are known to induce oxidative stress increasing the ROS concentration. As an example, in figure 1 we present experimental results of work performed by the authors, of the

effect of Cd and Cu in hydrogen peroxide content in roots of tobacco plants. As can be seen, there is a good correlation between Cu levels and  $H_2O_2$  content, but the effect of Cd showed only a small non-significant increase. These metals, an essential and a non-essential, do seem to provoke different responses in the plant. The increase in hydrogen peroxide levels with metals is a frequently reported stress indicator (Khatun et al., 2008; Mobin & Khan, 2007).

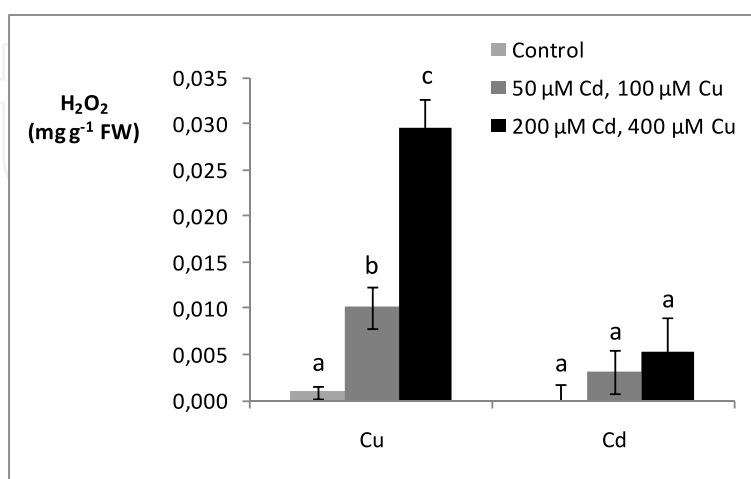


Fig. 1. Hydrogen peroxide content in *Nicotiana tabacum* L. plants grown in nutrient solution, with excess copper and cadmium.

## 2.2 ROS effect in different cellular components (lipids, DNA, proteins, carbohydrates)

When cell homeostasis is affected by a given stress, ROS production increases to the point where it can damage cellular components and ultimately lead to cell death. ROS can affect lipids, proteins, carbohydrates and DNA and the detailed mechanisms are well detailed in Moller et al. (2007).

Unsaturated fatty acids from lipid membranes are particularly susceptible to ROS oxidation, increasing membrane leakage. Lipid peroxidation occurs through a series of chain reactions that start when a ROS like the hydroxyl radical removes one hydrogen from a carbon from the fatty acid molecule (mainly at the unsaturation). An oxygen can then easily bond to that location forming a lipid peroxy radical, that can continue and propagate the same kind of reactions (Gill & Tuteja, 2010).

Proteins can also suffer oxidation by ROS, causing certain enzymes to lose its catalytic function. One of the more susceptible targets in proteins are thiol groups the oxidation of which can lead to protein denaturation and loss of functional conformation (Moller et al., 2007). Also, protein oxidation leads to the production of carbonyl groups and to increased rate of proteolysis as the damaged proteins are targeted by proteolytic enzymes (Palma et al., 2002).

Changes in protein content and in protein profile can be found as a consequence of the stress induced by toxic metals. In figure 2, we show the effect of excess copper (50  $\mu$ M) in the protein content of *Lupinus luteus* leaves, evidencing a significantly higher protein content after 11 days of excess copper, compared to control. In this work, lupin plants were grown in nutrient solution with the indicated Cu concentration. This protein increase could represent the positive balance from the inactivation of some proteins whereas other proteins are formed in relation to the defense response.

In figure 3, we present the protein profile of *Lupinus luteus* leaves after 11 days of exposition to different Cu concentrations. The protein profile showed some changes that can be related to the Cu concentration in nutrient solution. In fact, we found that some protein bands showed higher intensities (56.5 and 17.7 Da) while new protein bands were detected that were not present in control samples (28.5 and 14 Da). These new proteins could be related to the Cu defence mechanism of these plants.

DNA can also be attacked by ROS damaging nucleotide bases, causing mutations and genetic defects (Tuteja et al., 2001).

Both free carbohydrates and wall polysaccharides can react easily with the hydroxyl radical, and this can also be a defence mechanism if the radical reacts with these carbohydrates before damaging more biologically important molecules (Moller et al., 2007).

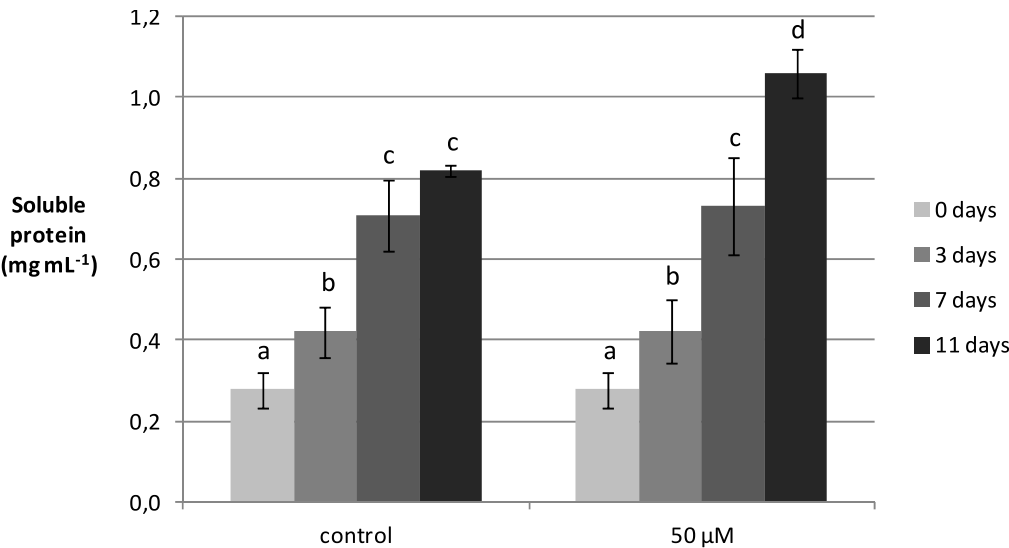


Fig. 2. Protein content of *Lupinus luteus* leaves grown in nutrient solution with 0.1 μM of Cu (control) and excess copper (50 μM) for up to 11 days.

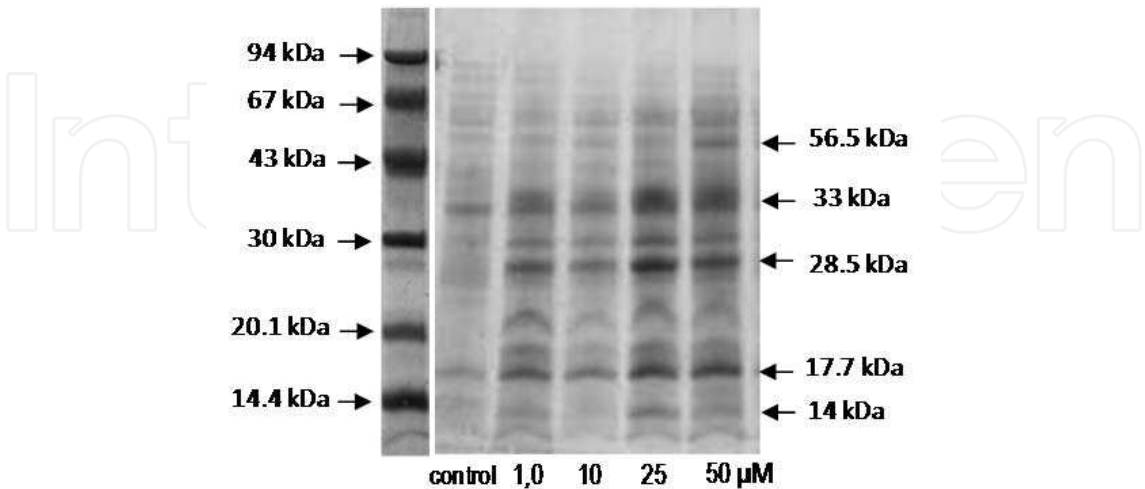


Fig. 3. SDS-PAGE protein profile of *Lupinus luteus* leaves after 11 days at different concentrations of copper. Electrophoresis was performed in a 12 % polyacrylamide gel stained with Commassie blue.



### 3. Antioxidant defence mechanisms

#### 3.1 Enzymatic mechanisms

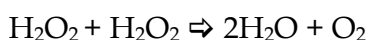
As was said before, enzymatic mechanisms and enzymes involved in specific metabolic pathways are one of the major antioxidative defence strategy of plant defence against excess ROS.

Superoxide dismutase (SOD, EC 1.15.1.1), catalyses the dismutation of superoxide molecules into hydrogen peroxide and oxygen (Alscher et al., 2002).

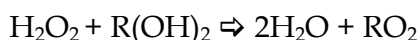


SOD has a metal cofactor and depending on the metal can be classified in three different groups, localized in different cell compartments: FeSOD (chloroplasts), MnSOD (mitochondria and peroxisomes), Cu/ZnSOD (chloroplast and cytosol). As SOD produces hydrogen peroxide that is subsequently converted to water by peroxidases and catalases, the activity of all these enzymes must be carefully balanced.

Catalase (CAT, EC 1.11.1.6) exists mainly in the peroxisomes and as during stress the number of these organelles increase, CAT can have an important role in  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  detoxification that can diffuse into the peroxisome from other cell locations where it is produced (Mittler, 2002). CAT catalyses the hydrogen peroxide breakdown to water:



Peroxidases (EC 1.11.1) are a member of a large family of enzymes that are ubiquitous in the cell and have numerous roles in plant metabolism (Passardi et al., 2005), namely to remove hydrogen peroxide formed due to induced stress using different reductants. They have the general reaction:



$\text{R}(\text{OH})_2$  represents different electron donors: guaiacol peroxidase (GPOD, EC 1.11.1.7) uses mainly phenolic donors, ascorbate peroxidase (APX, EC 1.11.1.11) uses ascorbic acid and glutathione peroxidase (GPX, EC 1.11.1.9) uses glutathione.

Besides their role as a scavenger of hydrogen peroxide, cell-wall peroxidases are also involved in ROS formation, both as a defence against biotic stresses and as a signalling process against several stresses, leading to the activation of other defence mechanisms (Mika et al., 2004).

APX has a much higher affinity to  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  than CAT suggesting that they have different roles in the scavenging of this ROS, with APX being responsible for maintaining the low levels of hydrogen peroxide while CAT is responsible for the removal of its excess (Mittler, 2002).

The water-water cycle (Figure 4) occurs in chloroplasts and is a fundamental mechanism to avoid photooxidative damage (Rizhsky et al., 2003), using SOD and APX to scavenge the superoxide radical and hydrogen peroxide in the location where they are produced avoiding the deleterious effects of their reactivity with other cellular components (Asada, 1999; Shigeoka et al., 2002).

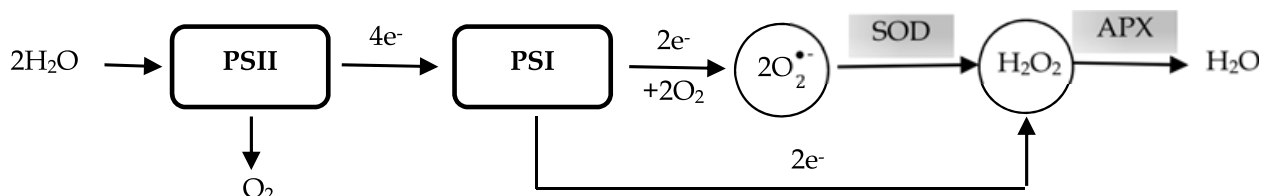


Fig. 4. The water-water cycle. PSI and PSII - Photosystems I and II, SOD - Superoxide dismutase, APX - ascorbate peroxidase.

The ascorbate-glutathione cycle (Figure 5) is an important group of reactions involved in ROS detoxification, as it converts hydrogen peroxide (formed as a consequence of an induced stress or via SOD action) and occurs in several cell compartments, like chloroplasts, cytosol, mitochondria, peroxisomes and apoplast. It uses APX and GPX as well as other enzymes like monodehydroascorbate reductase (MDHAR, EC 1.6.5.4) and dehydroascorbate reductase (DHAR, EC 1.8.5.1) that have a role in the regeneration of the reduced form of ascorbate and glutathione reductase (GR, EC 1.6.4.2), important to maintain the pool of reduced glutathione.

Other enzymes like heme oxygenase (HO, EC 1.14.99.3), that catalyzes the stereo specific cleavage of heme to biliverdin (Balestrasse et al., 2005) have been reported to have a role in plant defence mechanisms against oxidative stress.

### 3.2 Enzymatic responses to heavy metal stress

There has been extensive studies on the activities of the enzymes involved in ROS defence on plants subjected to heavy metal stress (Sharma & Dietz, 2009). Although different metals can cause oxidative stress, their mode of action is different. For example while copper, an essential element toxic at high concentrations, is involved in redox reactions, cadmium, which has no known biological function, cannot. However, they both can induce oxidative stress, through different mechanisms (Cuypers et al., 2010).

Of all the main enzymes involved in oxidative stress defence, like SOD, APX, CAT and peroxidases, published reports both describe an increase in its activity and a decrease (or no change), depending on plant species, plant organ, type of metal, duration of the treatment, plant age, and growing media (Gratão et al., 2005).

In table 2 we list some representative publications of this kind of studies, regarding determinations made at a single time of growth (time series studies show also changes along the time, further complicating the analysis). As can be seen, there is a huge variation between the behaviour of the enzymes involved in oxidative stress. In some situations the activity increases for lower concentrations of the metal and then decreases as the defence mechanism breaks down due to excessive concentration. This also shows that different components of the antioxidative defence system described above are active under different conditions. The increase in activity in a given enzyme can be a signal that that enzyme has been activated or its expression upregulated. On the other hand sometimes the effect of the metal can be so drastic that enzymes structures are being affected with a consequent decrease in activity. Several enzymes have metal cofactors so there could be a link between these enzymes expression and metal availability (Cohu & Pilon, 2007).



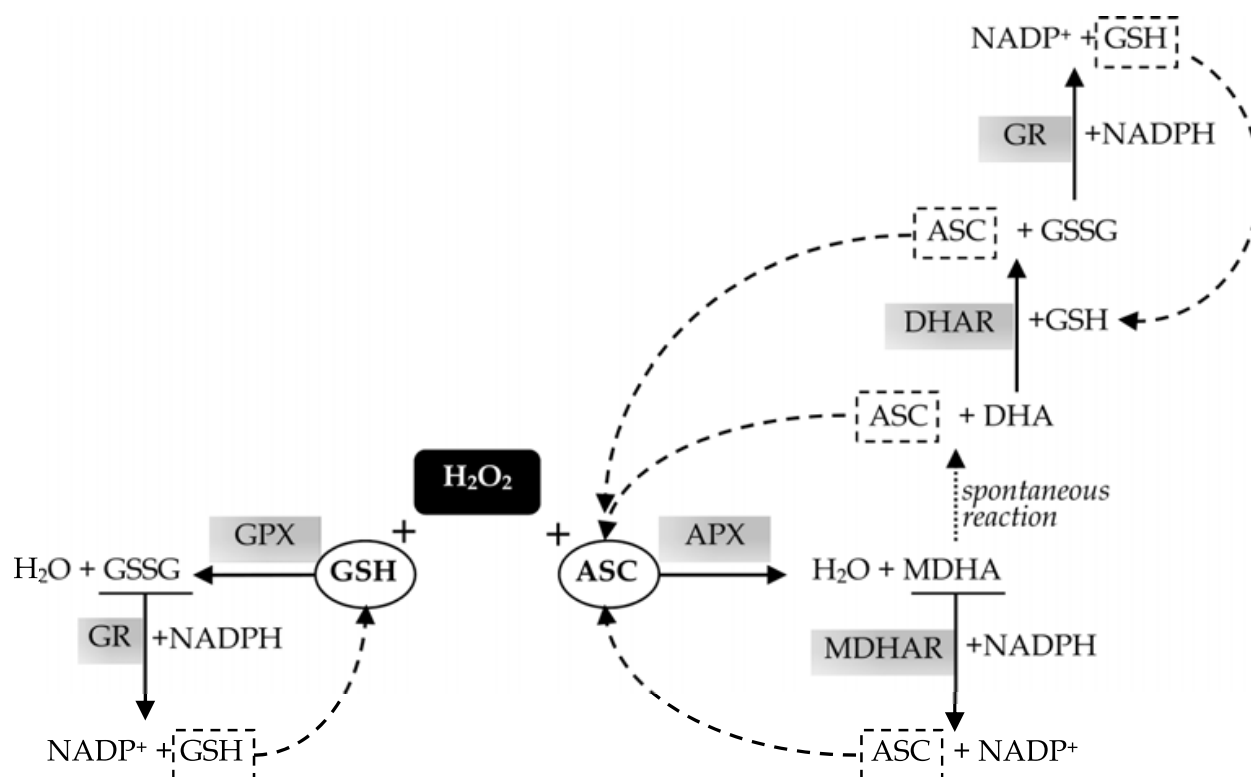


Fig. 5. The ascorbate-glutathione cycle. Non-enzymatic compounds: ASC - ascorbate, MDHA - monodehydroascorbate, DHA - dehydroascorbate, GSH - glutathione (reduced), GSSG - glutathione (oxidized). Enzymes (grey box): APX - ascorbate peroxidase, GPX - glutathione peroxidase, GR - glutathione reductase, MDHAR - monodehydroascorbate reductase, DHAR - dehydroascorbate reductase.

Consequently, enzymatic response can be complex to analyse. For example, in figure 6A we present the activity of guaiacol peroxidase in tomato roots growing for 3 days with 50  $\mu\text{M}$  Cu in nutrient solution. As can be seen by the relative activity, no significant changes in POD activity were detected compared to control. However, the isoperoxidase profile (figure 6B) showed the appearance of new isoforms in tomato roots (C, D), while other isoforms showed less intensity (A, B). These results indicate that although enzymatic activity can be similar in control and stressed plants it is possible that some isoforms can be activated in response to excess copper.

Polyphenol oxidase (PPO, EC 1.10.3.1) is an oxidoreductase that catalyzes the oxidation of phenols to quinones and its activity has been shown to increase under heavy metal stress and has thus been associated to some form of defence mechanism (Ali et al., 2006; L. L. Martins & Mourato, 2006). Kováčik et al. (2009) observed an increase in root PPO activity with Cu and Cd and concluded that the formation of polymerized phenols could be used to complex free metal ions. On the other hand PPO has also been associated to a catalase-like activity (Gerdemann et al., 2001), and could thus have a role in direct hydrogen peroxide removal.

Peroxiredoxins (PRX, EC 1.11.1.15) are ubiquitous antioxidant enzymes that participate in cellular redox homeostasis and reduce hydrogen peroxide to water. PRX levels have been shown to increase under several abiotic stresses suggesting a role in the defence mechanisms (Barranco-Medina et al., 2007).

Plant Species	Metal	Concentration	Organ	Enzyme	References
<i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i>	Cd	5, 10, 20 $\mu$ M	leaves	APX $\uparrow\downarrow$ , GPOD $\uparrow\downarrow$ , SOD =, CAT =, GR $\downarrow$	(Smeets et al., 2008)
<i>Brassica juncea</i>	Cd	10, 25, 50 $\mu$ M	leaves	APX $\downarrow$ , GPOD $\downarrow$ , CAT $\uparrow$ , GR =	(Nouairi et al., 2009)
"	Cd	10, 30, 50, 100 $\mu$ M	leaves	APX $\uparrow\downarrow$ , CAT $\downarrow$ , GR $\uparrow\downarrow$ , GPX $\downarrow$ , MDHAR $\uparrow\downarrow$ , DHAR $\uparrow\downarrow$	(Markovska et al., 2009)
"	As	5, 25 $\mu$ M	leaves	APX $\uparrow$ , SOD $\uparrow$ , CAT =	(Khan et al., 2009)
"	Cd	5, 15, 35 mg.kg <sup>-1</sup>	leaves	GPOD $\uparrow$ , APX $\uparrow\downarrow$ , CAT $\uparrow\downarrow$	(Pinto et al., 2009)
<i>Brassica napus</i>	Cd	10, 25, 50 $\mu$ M	leaves	APX $\downarrow$ , GPOD $\uparrow$ , CAT $\downarrow$ , GR $\uparrow\downarrow$	(Nouairi et al., 2009)
<i>Cannabis sativa</i>	Cd	25, 50, 100 mg.kg <sup>-1</sup>	seedlings	GPOD $\uparrow$ , SOD $\uparrow$ , CAT =	(Shi et al., 2009)
<i>Daucus carota</i>	Cu	100, 200, 400, 800 mg.kg <sup>-1</sup>	leaves	APX $\downarrow\uparrow$ , SOD $\uparrow\downarrow$ , CAT $\uparrow\downarrow$	(Ke et al., 2007)
<i>Elsholtzia splendens</i>	Cu	25, 50, 100, 500 $\mu$ M	leaves	APX $\uparrow$ , GPOD $\downarrow\uparrow$ , SOD $\uparrow$ , CAT $\uparrow$	(Peng et al., 2006)
<i>Matricaria chamomilla</i>	Cd	3, 60, 120 $\mu$ M	leaves, roots	CAT $\uparrow$ , GR $\uparrow$	(Kováčik & Backor, 2008)
"	Cu	3, 60, 120 $\mu$ M	leaves, roots	CAT $\uparrow$ , GR $\uparrow$	(Kováčik & Backor, 2008)
<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i>	Cd	10, 25, 50, 100 $\mu$ M	young leaves old leaves	GPOD $\uparrow$ , SOD $\downarrow$ GPOD $\uparrow$ , SOD $\uparrow$	(Martins et al., 2011)
"	Cd	5, 15, 35 mg.kg <sup>-1</sup>	leaves	GPOD =, APX $\downarrow\uparrow$ , CAT $\uparrow$	(Pinto et al., 2009)
<i>Solanum nigrum</i>	Cd	5, 15, 35 mg.kg <sup>-1</sup>	leaves	GPOD $\uparrow$ , APX $\uparrow$ , CAT $\uparrow$	(Pinto et al., 2009)
<i>Typha angustifolia</i>	Cd	1 mM	leaves	GPOD $\uparrow$ , APX =, GPX =, SOD $\uparrow$ , CAT =	(Bah et al., 2011)
"	Cr	2 mM	leaves	GPOD $\uparrow$ , APX =, GPX =, SOD $\uparrow$ , CAT =	(Bah et al., 2011)
"	Pb	1 mM	leaves	GPOD $\uparrow$ , APX =, GPX =, SOD =, CAT =	(Bah et al., 2011)

Plant Species	Metal	Concentration	Organ	Enzyme	References
<i>Withania somnifera</i>	Cu	10, 25, 50, 100, 200 $\mu$ M	leaves	APX $\uparrow\downarrow$ , GPOD $\uparrow$ , SOD $\downarrow$ , CAT $\downarrow$ , GR $\downarrow$ , MDHAR $\uparrow$ , DHAR $\downarrow\uparrow$	(Khatun et al., 2008)
<i>Zea mays</i>	Cd	300, 600, 900 $\mu$ M	leaves	APX $\uparrow\downarrow$ , GPOD $\uparrow\downarrow$ , SOD $\uparrow$ , GR $\uparrow\downarrow$	(Ekmekci et al., 2008)

Table 2. Changes in enzyme activities for several plants and metals. The symbols after the enzymes indicate if its activity increased ( $\uparrow$ ), decreased ( $\downarrow$ ), remained the same (=) or increased for lower concentrations and decreased for higher concentrations or vice-versa( $\uparrow\downarrow$  or  $\downarrow\uparrow$ ).

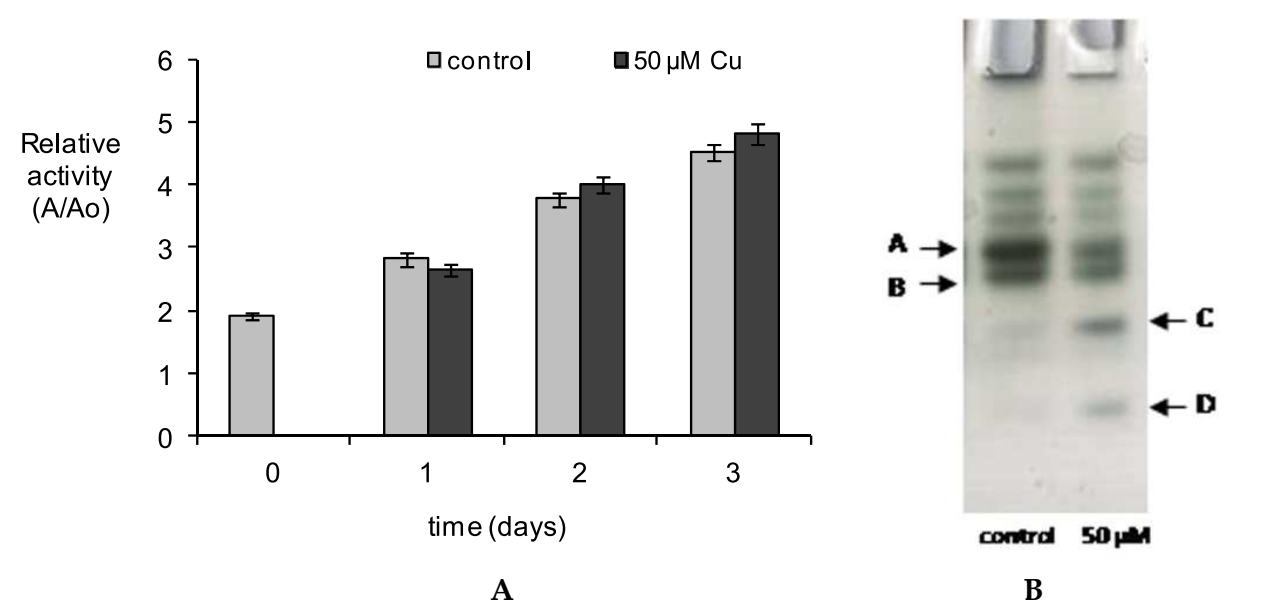


Fig. 6. Guaiacol peroxidase activity of tomato roots for 3 days of 50  $\mu$ M Cu in nutrient solution (A) and the correspondent isoperoxidase profile for plants collected after 3 days (B). Cu concentration in control plants was 0.1  $\mu$ M.

3.3 Non enzymatic mechanisms

Besides the enzymatic mechanisms described in the two previous chapters, there is a whole range of other substances that have been reported to be involved in antioxidative defence in plants. Some are well known and have been extensively studied (like the role of ascorbate and glutathione) while others are thought to be part of defence mechanisms but its role remains to be fully understood. While many studies report the increase in the concentration of some substance in relation to the induction of a stress, this type of correlation is not, by itself, conclusive enough to ascertain the effect of that substance in the plant metabolism.

Of course, when the levels of the compounds described in this chapter increase, most of the enzymes involved in the respective biosynthesis are also induced.

Several organic molecules have been reported to be able to form complexes with heavy metals, like phytochelatins (see section 3.4), organic acids and amino acids like proline. But exactly what kind of molecules complex the metals seem to be highly dependent not only on metal type and plant species but also on plant organ and compartment, as different complexes can be formed in the cytoplasm, the xylem and phloem, for example (Sharma & Dietz, 2006).

Ascorbate and glutathione are antioxidants that exist in relatively high concentration in cell compartments (Potters et al., 2002), and are involved in the ascorbate-glutathione cycle as described above being also a substrate for APX an enzyme important in  $H_2O_2$  removal. Ascorbate (ASC) is an electron donor that can be oxidized to the radical monodehydroascorbate (MDHA) and this compound can then form dehydroascorbate (DHA) (Figure 7):

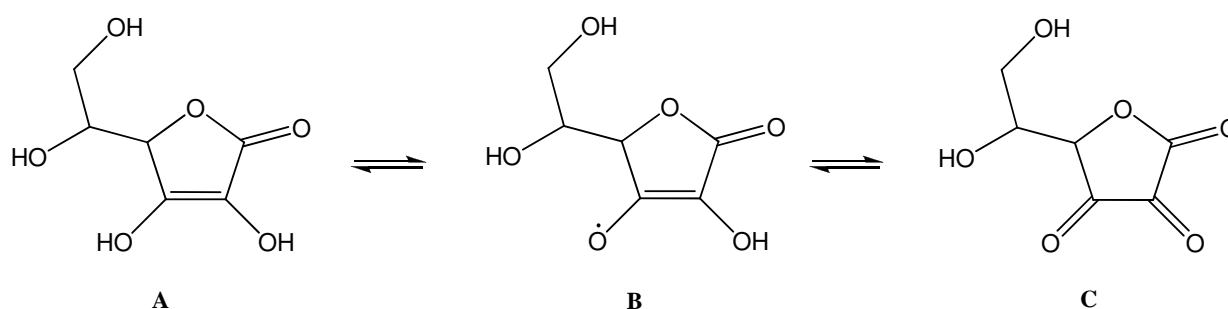


Fig. 7. Structure of ascorbate (A), monodehydroascorbate (B) and dehydroascorbate (C)

Besides its role as an enzyme substrate, ascorbate also reacts directly with singlet oxygen and superoxide and is important in the regeneration of  $\alpha$ -tocopherol and certain carotenoids (Potters et al., 2002).

Glutathione (Figure 8) is a tripeptide (containing glutamate, cysteine and glycine) that can exist in two predominant forms: the reduced form (usually represented by GSH) and the oxidized form (usually represented by GSSG) (Noctor & Foyer, 1998). It is involved in the sulphur metabolism and in defence reactions against oxidative stress (Potters et al., 2002). It can also lead to the synthesis of phytochelatins that are important sequesters for certain heavy metals (Cobbett & Goldsbrough, 2002).

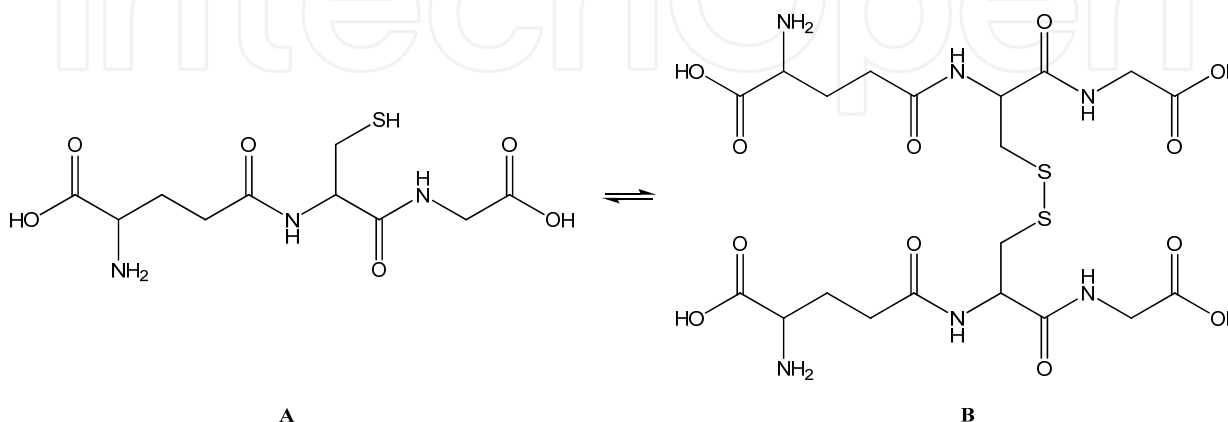


Fig. 8. Structure of glutathione in its reduced (A) and oxidized forms (B)

Heat shock proteins (HSP) are proteins that not only showed increased expression under heat stress but are also molecular chaperones that protect other proteins from stress induced damage (Feder & Hofmann, 1999). HSP help proteins maintain or recover their native conformation, and remove potentially harmful polypeptides. HSP expression has been associated to high temperature, cold, drought, light, heavy metals, salt and ozone stresses (Timperio et al., 2008). Kochhar & Kochhar (2005) detected the induction of both high and low molecular weight HSPs in response to combined heat and cadmium stress. ROS also have a signaling role during a stress, in order to induce HSP production (Timperio et al., 2008).

Carotenoids have an important protective role during photosynthesis as these molecules can quench the excited states of chlorophyll in order to avoid the production of singlet oxygen. As a consequence, the carotenoid molecules become themselves excited but this is not a big problem as they don't have enough energy to form this ROS species (Taiz & Zeiger, 2002).

Terpenoids are a large class of organic compounds derived from the isoprene unit that could also have an antioxidative role in plants, although that is not yet clear (Grassmann et al., 2002).

Flavonoids are organic molecules with a structure similar to flavone (Figure 9), that have been shown to have a protective role against several stresses (Jaakola et al., 2004), both by themselves and in conjugation with peroxidases (Mika et al., 2004). Anthocyanins, a type of flavonoids (they are glucosides of anthocyanidins, Figure 9) present in the vacuoles, have an antioxidative capacity (Kahkonen & Heinonen, 2003) but its location in the cell prevents them to contact directly with ROS production sites, although its levels have been reported to increase under Cd stress (Mobin & Khan, 2007).

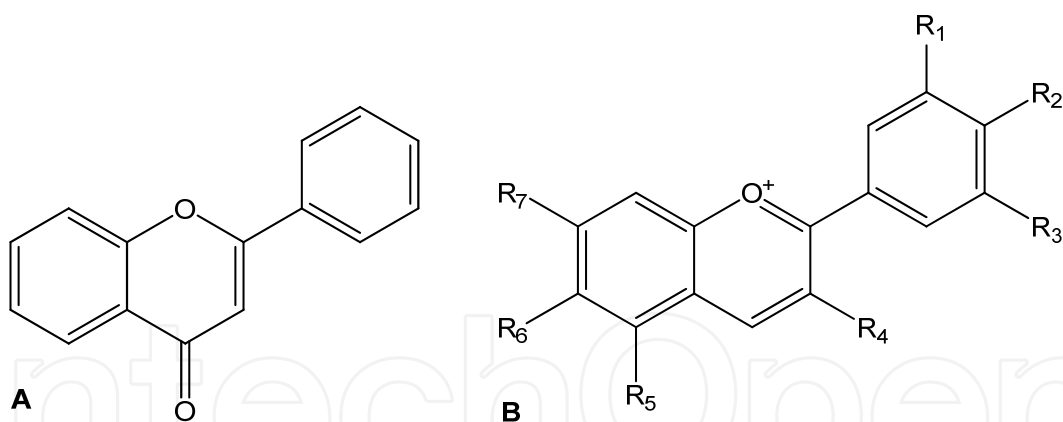


Fig. 9. Structure of flavone (A) and of anthocyanidins (B, where  $R_1$  to  $R_7$  can be H, OH or  $OCH_3$  according to the exact type of anthocyanidin)

Thiols can play an important antioxidative role, protecting membrane lipids. Lipoic acid (Figure 10), both in its reduced and oxidized form, is reported to have antioxidative properties due to its direct scavenging of ROS. It is also able to chelate several metal ions that induces oxidative stress (Navari-Izzo et al., 2002) and thus can have an important role in cell protection.

Tocopherols are a class of compounds synthesized by photosynthetic organisms that have vitamin E activity.  $\alpha$ -Tocopherol (Figure 11) is the most common form in leaves while  $\gamma$ -tocopherol is more common in roots (Abbasi et al., 2007). They have a role in ROS

protection as they can quench singlet oxygen (Gill & Tuteja, 2010) and can act as an antioxidant and terminate chain reactions occurring during lipid peroxidation (Garg & Manchanda, 2009).

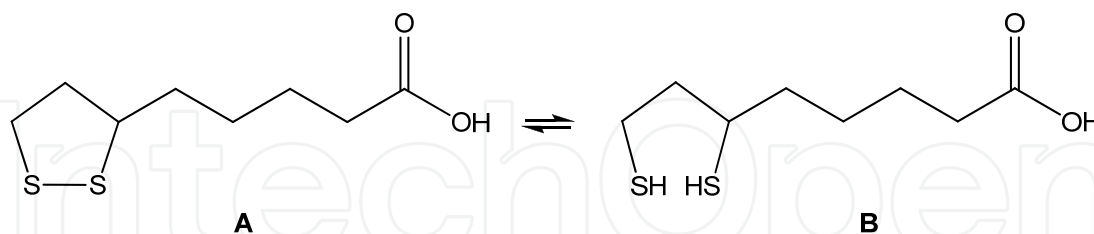


Fig. 10. Structure of lipoic acid in its oxidized (A) and reduced (B) forms.

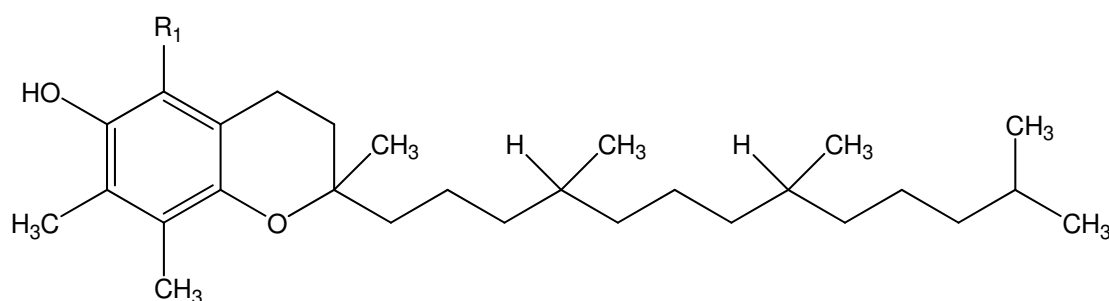


Fig. 11. Common structure of  $\alpha$ -tocopherol (with  $R_1=CH_3$ ) and of  $\gamma$ -tocopherol (with  $R_1=H$ ).

Proline (an amino acid, shown in figure 12A), is a compatible solute that participate in the osmotic adjustment of plant cells being able to balance water stress. Proline has been reported to improve plant resistance to oxidative stress by scavenging ROS (namely by quenching singlet oxygen and hydroxyl radicals), increasing the activity of antioxidative enzymes and protecting them and maintaining redox homeostasis (Matysik et al., 2002), and they could also participate in signalling pathways that regulate stress related genes (Khedr et al., 2003). Although the concentration of proline has been shown to increase under heavy metal stress in certain plants (Martins et al., 2011), its exact role in heavy metal detoxification is unclear as, under certain conditions, it could be only an indirect response due to heavy-metal induced disturbances in plant water balance (Schat et al., 1997).

Histidine (figure 12B) is another amino acid that has been mainly linked to Ni hyperaccumulator plants (Sharma & Dietz, 2006).

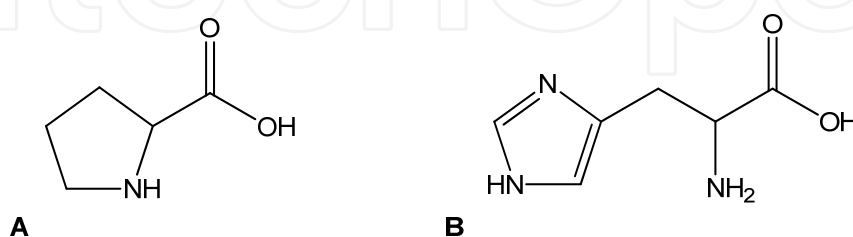


Fig. 12. Structure of proline (A) and histidine (B).

Glycine betaine (2-trimethylammonioacetate, figure 13A) is another compatible solute that is involved in plant resistance against abiotic stresses, namely salt stress (Banu et al., 2009). It helps not only in controlling water balance but can also help to maintain protein and



membrane structure (F.-L. Zhang et al., 2008). Nicotianamine (figure 13B) is an amino acid that has a known role in heavy metal transport in plants (Stephan & Scholz, 1993), but recent findings have suggested an important role also in heavy metal tolerance namely in relation to hyper accumulating species (Sharma & Dietz, 2006). Mugineic acid (figure 13C) is a siderophore (that is, an iron-chelating compound) that promotes iron acquisition from the rhizosphere, but that may also participate in the distribution of other metals in the plant (Haydon & Cobbett, 2007). Meda et al. (2007) reports that phytosiderophores can alleviate Cd toxicity in maize.

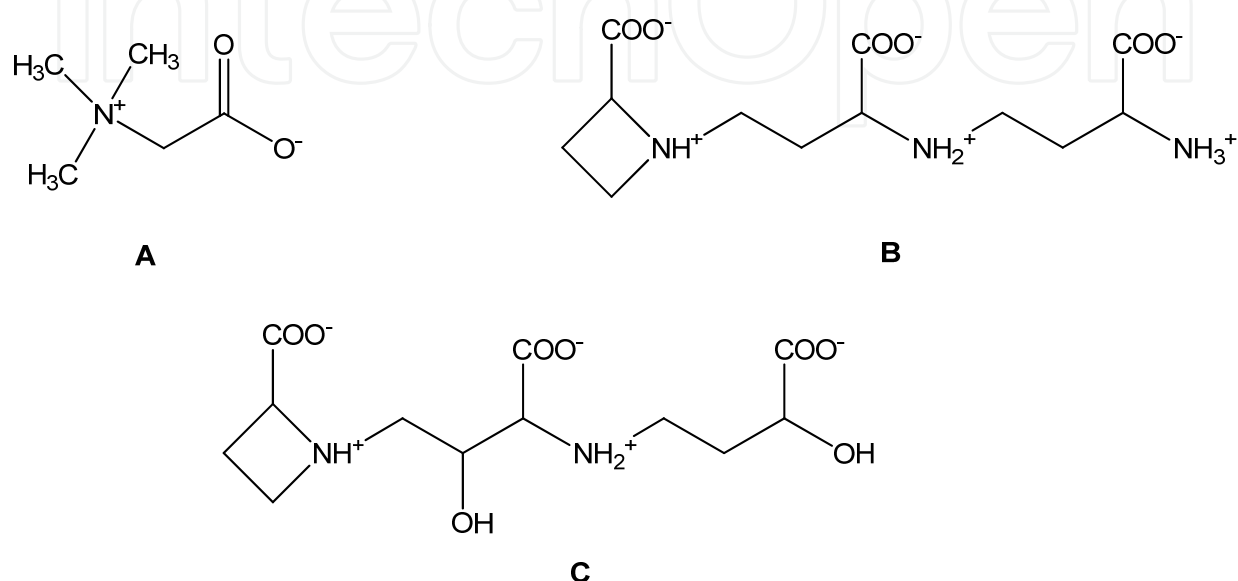


Fig. 13. Structure of glycine betaine (A), nicotianamine (B) and mugineic acid (C).

Polyamines are low molecular weight amines (figure 14) that have a role in plant growth and developmental processes (Kakkar & Sawhney, 2002). The concentration of some polyamines has been reported to increase under abiotic stress. Mascher (2002) showed that the concentration of putrescine, spermidine and spermine increased when red clover plants were subjected to As toxicity. However it is still not clear the exact role these compounds play in heavy metal defence, but a participation in the stabilization and protection of the membrane systems has been proposed (Sharma & Dietz, 2006).

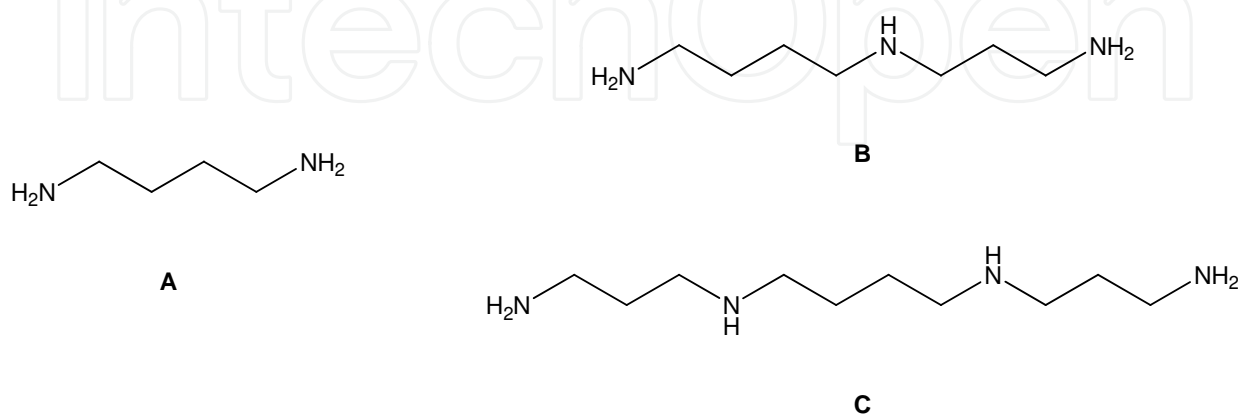


Fig. 14. Structure of several polyamines. A - putrescine (a di-amine); B - spermidine (a tri-amine); C - spermine (a tetra-amine)

Although soluble sugars have been linked to metabolic pathways that produce ROS, they can also have an important role in ROS scavenging mechanisms. Increased glucose levels can increase the production of NADPH (via the pentose-phosphate pathway), that is an important intermediate in the ascorbate-glutathione cycle (Couée et al., 2006) as NADPH is the primary electron donor that assures a intracellular reduction status. Both glucose and sucrose levels have been shown to increase in some plant species under certain abiotic stresses but it is not obvious that this happens due to a putative defence mechanism induction (Couée et al., 2006), although these sugars also participate in signalling mechanisms. Van den Ende and Valluru (2009) suggest that sucrose might have a protective role against stress due to its capacity to scavenge ROS. Other sugars like raffinose (Figure 15A) and fructans (which are fructose polymers) are also reported to have a protective role of membranes against several stresses, namely freezing and drought stress (Van den Ende & Valluru, 2009).

Trehalose (Figure 15B) is a non-reducing disaccharide that can also participate in the stabilization of membranes and protection of proteins under abiotic stresses (Luo et al., 2008). Although trehalose exists in numerous organisms (like bacteria, fungi and nematodes) it is not found widespread in plants, and when it is found is usually in very low concentrations (Wingler, 2002), but several studies have correlated the availability of this disaccharide (or the expression of the genes related to its synthesis) with stress responses. Almeida et al. (2005) found that transgenic tobacco plants over-expressing trehalose-6-phosphate synthase had higher resistance against different abiotic stresses (like drought and temperature). Nery et al. (2008) stated that trehalose participated in protecting cells against hydrogen peroxide, by preventing oxidation of both membranes and proteins.

Brassinosteroids are a family of polyhydroxysteroids that have been reported to modify the activity of antioxidant enzymes and the level of non-enzymatic compounds (like ascorbic acid and tocopherols), when plants are subjected to different abiotic stresses, but its effect is still poorly understood (Bajguz & Hayat, 2009). ROS also have a signalling role in hormone responses, like ABA, auxin and ethylene (Kwak et al., 2006).

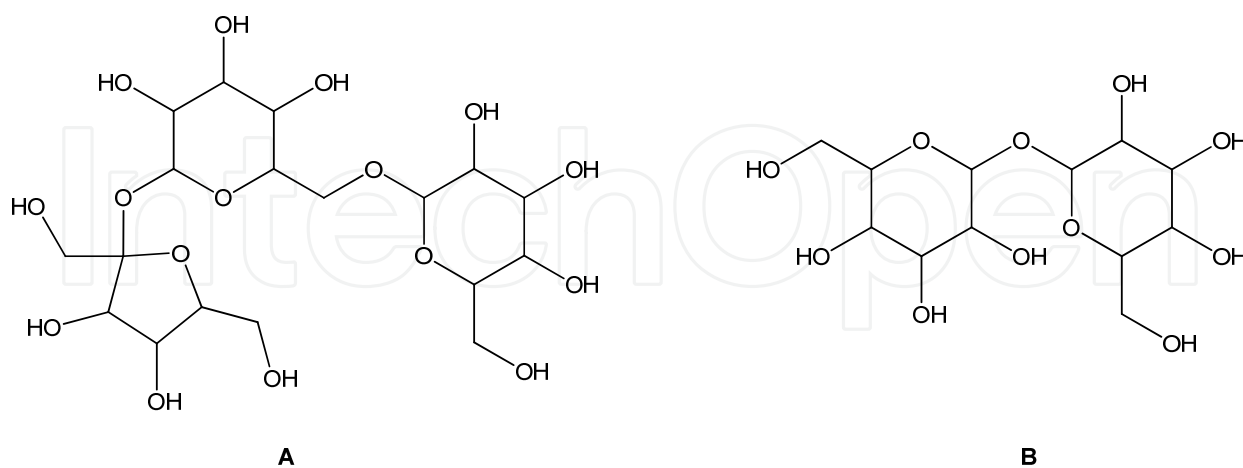


Fig. 15. Structure of raffinose (A) and trehalose (B)

### 3.4 Other non enzymatic substances involved in heavy metal tolerance

Several other substances, not described above, have been reported to be involved in the tolerance mechanisms against heavy metal tolerance. Metals are rarely available in the free

ionic form in plants but are bound to different types of organic molecules. These include organic acids (like citric and maleic acid) and some amino acids (Haydon & Cobbett, 2007). In fact, organic acids, among other organic solutes of several types, can accumulate in leaves in stress conditions, such as water stress, with an important role on subcellular structures protection acting as osmolytes (Pinheiro et al., 2004). One possible effect of heavy metal stress is that plants restrict water uptake, thus indirectly inducing water stress.

Any changes in the concentrations of the intermediate organic acids can reflect an influence of a heavy metal in metabolic pathways as they are involved in primary plant metabolism such as cell respiration and the formation of ATP. Organic acids can have a detoxification role complexing metals, and reducing their availability to the plant, but this role is not yet fully understood (Hall, 2002).

The metabolism of several phenols has been reported to change under Cu and Cd stress indicating a putative role of these compounds in heavy metal detoxification by decreasing the presence of the free metal ions (Kováčik et al., 2009). Lignin accumulation has also been described as a consequence of Cu toxicity (Lequeux et al., 2010) but whether this is related to a heavy metal defence mechanism is still not clear.

Zorrig et al. (2010) suggested a transport role for citrate to translocate Cd from the roots to the shoots of lettuce plants while Panfili et al. (2009) also studied the effect of citrate in the uptake of Cd. Citrate and malate have been reported to be major ligands for Zn and Ni in several studies (Haydon & Cobbett, 2007).

Phytochelatins (PC) are small metal-binding peptides with the structure  $(\gamma\text{-Glu-Cys})_n\text{-Gly}$  (figure 16) where  $n$  ranges between 2 and 11 (Cobbett & Goldsbrough, 2002). Its synthesis is catalyzed by phytochelatin synthase using glutathione as a substrate (Clemens, 2006; Grill et al., 1989). They form complexes with metals like Cd (due to the high affinity metals have to the thiol group present in cysteine) and sequester them to the vacuoles and are thus an important mechanism that plants use to avoid heavy metal toxicity. Other peptides with a structure similar to phytochelatins have been identified, with the terminal Gly being replaced by other amino acids like serine, glutamic acid and glutamine in the case of iso-phytochelatins or alanine in homophytochelatins (Oven et al., 2002). All of these peptides have been reported to participate in the detoxification mechanisms of various plant species against several metals or metalloids, besides Cd, like As (Vázquez et al., 2009) and Pb (Z. C. Zhang et al., 2008).

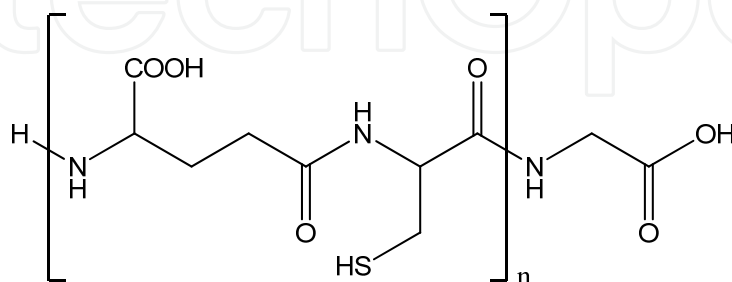


Fig. 16. General structure of phytochelatins ( $n$  ranges between 2 and 11).

Metallothioneins (MT) are other small peptides and in plants they contain typically between 60 to 85 amino acids (Freisinger, 2009), also containing cysteine in various amounts

according to the type of MT. They have a different synthesis pathway from phytochelatins (Cobbett & Goldsbrough, 2002), and are thought to be important in metal complexation, but can also have other roles like ROS scavenging (Hassinen et al., 2011). MTs are reported to be much more important in Cu tolerance of certain plants than PCs (Mijovilovich et al., 2009).

#### 4. Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the financial support of *Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia*, through its project PTDC/AGR-AAM/102821/2008 and the Research Unit Environmental Chemistry.

#### 5. References

- Abbasi, A.-R., Hajirezaei, M., Hofius, D., Sonnewald, U., & Voll, L. M. (2007). Specific Roles of {alpha}- and {gamma}-Tocopherol in Abiotic Stress Responses of Transgenic Tobacco. *Plant Physiology*, Vol.143, No.4, 1720-1738.
- Adriano, D. C., Wenzel, W. W., Vangronsveld, J., & Bolan, N. S. (2004). Role of assisted natural remediation in environmental cleanup. *Geoderma*, Vol.122, 121-142.
- Ahmad, P., Sarwat, M., & Sharma, S. (2008). Reactive oxygen species, antioxidants and signaling in plants. *Journal of Plant Biology*, Vol.51, No.3, 167-173.
- Almeida, A. M., Villalobos, E., Araújo, S. S., Leyman, B. V. D. P., Alfaro-Cardoso, L., Fevereiro, P. S., Torné, J. M., & Santos, D. M. (2005). Transformation of tobacco with an *Arabidopsis thaliana* gene involved in trehalose biosynthesis increases tolerance to several abiotic stresses. *Euphytica*, Vol.146, 165-176.
- Alscher, R. G., Erturk, N., & Heath, L. S. (2002). Role of superoxide dismutases (SODs) in controlling oxidative stress in plants. *Journal of Experimental Botany*, Vol.53, No.372, 1331-1341.
- Asada, K. (1999). The Water-Water Cycle in Chloroplasts: Scavenging of Active Oxygens and Dissipation of Excess Photons. *Annual Review of Plant Physiology & Plant Molecular Biology*, Vol.50, No.1, 601.
- Asada, K. (2006). Production and scavenging of reactive oxygen species in chloroplasts and their functions. *Plant Physiology*, Vol.141, No.2, 391-396.
- Bah, A. M., Dai, H., Zhao, J., Sun, H., Cao, F., Zhang, G., & Wu, F. (2011). Effects of Cadmium, Chromium and Lead on Growth, Metal Uptake and Antioxidative Capacity in *Typha angustifolia*. *Biological Trace Element Research*, Vol.142, No.1, 77-92.
- Bajguz, A., & Hayat, S. (2009). Effects of brassinosteroids on the plant responses to environmental stresses. *Plant Physiology and Biochemistry*, Vol.47, No.1, 1-8.
- Balestrasse, K. B., Noriega, G. O., Batlle, A., & Tomaro, M. L. (2005). Involvement of heme oxygenase as antioxidant defense in soybean nodules. *Free Radical Research*, Vol.39, No.2, 145-151.
- Banu, M. N. A., Hoque, M. A., Watanabe-Sugimoto, M., Matsuoka, K., Nakamura, Y., Shimoishi, Y., & Murata, Y. (2009). Proline and glycinebetaine induce antioxidant defense gene expression and suppress cell death in cultured tobacco cells under salt stress. *Journal of Plant Physiology*, Vol.166, No.2, 146-156.
- Barranco-Medina, S., Krell, T., Finkemeier, I., Sevilla, F., Lazaro, J.-J., & Dietz, K.-J. (2007). Biochemical and molecular characterization of the mitochondrial peroxiredoxin

- PsPrxII F from *Pisum sativum*. *Plant Physiology and Biochemistry*, Vol.45, No.10-11, 729-739.
- Clemens, S. (2006). Evolution and function of phytochelatin synthases. *Journal of Plant Physiology*, Vol.163, No.3, 319-332.
- Cobbett, C., & Goldsbrough, P. (2002). Phytochelatins and metallothioneins: Roles in heavy metal detoxification and homeostasis. *Annual Review of Plant Biology*, Vol.53, 159-182.
- Cohu, C. M., & Pilon, M. (2007). Regulation of superoxide dismutase expression by copper availability. *Physiologia Plantarum*, Vol.129, No.4, 747-755.
- Couée, I., Sulmon, C., Gouesbet, G., & El Amrani, A. (2006). Involvement of soluble sugars in reactive oxygen species balance and responses to oxidative stress in plants. *Journal of Experimental Botany*, Vol.57, No.3, 449-459.
- Cuypers, A., Plusquin, M., Remans, T., Jozefczak, M., Keunen, E., Gielen, H., Opdenakker, K., Nair, A., Munters, E., Artois, T., Nawrot, T., Vangronsveld, J., & Smeets, K. (2010). Cadmium stress: an oxidative challenge. *BioMetals*, Vol.23, No.5, 927-940.
- del Rio, L. A., Sandalio, L. M., Corpas, F. J., Palma, J. M., & Barroso, J. B. (2006). Reactive oxygen species and reactive nitrogen species in peroxisomes. Production, scavenging, and role in cell signaling. *Plant Physiology*, Vol.141, No.2, 330-335.
- Ekmekci, Y., Tanyolac, D., & Ayhan, B. (2008). Effects of cadmium on antioxidant enzyme and photosynthetic activities in leaves of two maize cultivars. *Journal of Plant Physiology*, Vol.165, No.6, 600-611.
- Feder, M. E., & Hofmann, G. E. (1999). Heat-shock proteins, molecular chaperones, and the stress response: Evolutionary and ecological physiology. *Annual Review of Physiology*, Vol.61, 243-282.
- Foyer, C. H., Lelandais, M., & Kunert, K. J. (1994). Photooxidative Stress in Plants. *Physiologia Plantarum*, Vol.92, No.4, 696-717.
- Foyer, C. H., & Noctor, G. (2003). Redox sensing and signalling associated with reactive oxygen in chloroplasts, peroxisomes and mitochondria. *Physiologia Plantarum*, Vol.119, No.3, 355-364.
- Freinbichler, W., Colivicchi, M. A., Stefanini, C., Bianchi, L., Ballini, C., Misini, B., Weinberger, P., Linert, W., Vareslija, D., Tipton, K. F., & Della Corte, L. (2011). Highly reactive oxygen species: detection, formation, and possible functions. *Cellular and Molecular Life Sciences*, Vol.68, No.12, 2067-2079.
- Freisinger, E. (2009). Metallothioneins in Plants. In A. Sigel, H. Sigel & R. K. O. Sigel (Eds.), *Metallothioneins and Related Chelators* (Vol. 5, pp. 107-153). Cambridge: The Royal Society of Chemistry.
- Garg, N., & Manchanda, G. (2009). ROS generation in plants: Boon or bane? *Plant Biosystems*, Vol.143, No.1, 81 - 96.
- Gill, S. S., & Tuteja, N. (2010). Reactive oxygen species and antioxidant machinery in abiotic stress tolerance in crop plants. *Plant Physiology and Biochemistry*, Vol.48, No.12, 909-930.
- Grassmann, J., Hippeli, S., & Elstner, E. F. (2002). Plant's defence and its benefits for animals and medicine: role of phenolics and terpenoids in avoiding oxygen stress. *Plant Physiology and Biochemistry*, Vol.40, No.6-8, 471-478.
- Gratão, P. L., Polle, A., Lea, P. J., & Azevedo, R. A. (2005). Making the life of heavy metal stressed plants a little easier. *Functional Plant Biology*, Vol.32, 481-494.
- Grill, E., Löffler, S., Winnacker, E. L., & Zenk, M. H. (1989). Phytochelatins, the Heavy-Metal-Binding Peptides of Plants, Are Synthesized from Glutathione by a Specific Gamma-



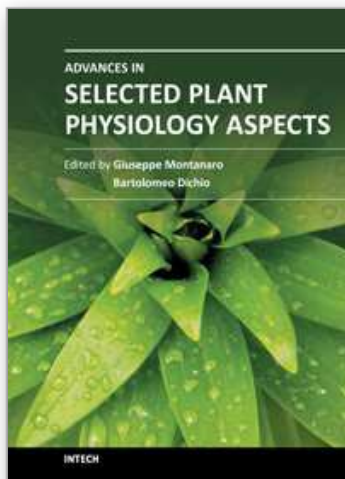
- Glutamylcysteine Dipeptidyl Transpeptidase (Phytochelatase). *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, Vol.86, No.18, 6838-6842.
- Hall, J. L. (2002). Cellular mechanisms for heavy metal detoxification and tolerance. *Journal of Experimental Botany*, Vol.53, No.366, 1-11.
- Halliwell, B. (2006). Reactive species and antioxidants. Redox biology is a fundamental theme of aerobic life. *Plant Physiology*, Vol.141, No.2, 312-322.
- Hassinen, V. H., Tervahauta, A. I., Schat, H., & Karenlampi, S. O. (2011). Plant metallothioneins - metal chelators with ROS scavenging activity? *Plant Biology*, Vol.13, No.2, 225-232.
- Haydon, M. J., & Cobbett, C. S. (2007). Transporters of ligands for essential metal ions in plants. *New Phytologist*, Vol.174, No.3, 499-506.
- Jaakola, L., Määtä-Riihinen, K., Kärenlampi, S., & Hohtola, A. (2004). Activation of flavonoid biosynthesis by solar radiation in bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus* L.) leaves. *Planta*, Vol.218, No.5, 721-728.
- Kahkonen, M. P., & Heinonen, M. (2003). Antioxidant activity of anthocyanins and their aglycons. *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, Vol.51, No.3, 628-633.
- Kakkar, R. K., & Sawhney, V. K. (2002). Polyamine research in plants - a changing perspective. *Physiologia Plantarum*, Vol.116, No.3, 281-292.
- Ke, W. S., Xiong, Z. T., Xie, M. J., & Luo, Q. (2007). Accumulation, subcellular localization and ecophysiological responses to copper stress in two *Daucus carota* L. populations. *Plant and Soil*, Vol.292, No.1-2, 291-304.
- Khan, I., Ahmad, A., & Iqbal, M. (2009). Modulation of antioxidant defence system for arsenic detoxification in Indian mustard. *Ecotoxicology and Environmental Safety*, Vol.72, No.2, 626-634.
- Khatun, S., Ali, M. B., Hahn, E.-J., & Paek, K.-Y. (2008). Copper toxicity in *Withania somnifera*: Growth and antioxidant enzymes responses of in vitro grown plants. *Environmental and Experimental Botany*, Vol.64, No.3, 279-285.
- Khedr, A. H. A., Abbas, M. A., Wahid, A. A. A., Quick, W. P., & Abogadallah, G. M. (2003). Proline induces the expression of salt stress responsive proteins and may improve the adaptation of *Pancreaticum maritimum* L. to salt stress. *Journal of Experimental Botany*, Vol.54, No.392, 2553-2562.
- Kochhar, S., & Kochhar, V. K. (2005). Expression of antioxidant enzymes and heat shock proteins in relation to combined stress of cadmium and heat in *Vigna mungo* seedlings. *Plant Science*, Vol.168, No.4, 921-929.
- Kováčik, J., & Bačkor, M. (2008). Oxidative status of *Matricaria chamomilla* plants related to cadmium and copper uptake. *Ecotoxicology*, Vol.17, No.6, 471-479.
- Kováčik, J., Klejdus, B., Hedbavny, J., Štork, F., & Bačkor, M. (2009). Comparison of cadmium and copper effect on phenolic metabolism, mineral nutrients and stress-related parameters in *Matricaria chamomilla* plants. *Plant and Soil*, Vol.320, No.1, 231-242.
- Kwak, J. M., Nguyen, V., & Schroeder, J. I. (2006). The role of reactive oxygen species in hormonal responses. *Plant Physiology*, Vol.141, No.2, 323-329.
- Lequeux, H., Hermans, C., Lutts, S., & Verbruggen, N. (2010). Response to copper excess in *Arabidopsis thaliana*: Impact on the root system architecture, hormone distribution, lignin accumulation and mineral profile. *Plant Physiology and Biochemistry*, Vol.48, No.8, 673-682.



- Luo, Y., Li, W.-M., & Wang, W. (2008). Trehalose: Protector of antioxidant enzymes or reactive oxygen species scavenger under heat stress? *Environmental and Experimental Botany*, Vol.63, No.1-3, 378-384.
- Markovska, Y. K., Gorinova, N. I., Nedkovska, M. P., & Miteva, K. M. (2009). Cadmium-induced oxidative damage and antioxidant responses in *Brassica juncea* plants. *Biologia Plantarum*, Vol.53, No.1, 151-154.
- Martins, L. L., Mourato, M. P., Cardoso, A. I., Pinto, A. P., Mota, A. M., Goncalves, M. d. L. S., & de Varennes, A. (2011). Oxidative stress induced by cadmium in *Nicotiana tabacum* L.: effects on growth parameters, oxidative damage and antioxidant responses in different plant parts. *Acta Physiologiae Plantarum*, Vol.33, No.4, 1375-1383.
- Mascher, R., Lippmann, B., Holzinger, S., & Bergmann, H. (2002). Arsenate toxicity: effects on oxidative stress response molecules and enzymes in red clover plants. *Plant Science*, Vol.163, No.5, 961-969.
- Matysik, J., Alia, Bhalu, B., & Mohanty, P. (2002). Molecular mechanisms of quenching of reactive oxygen species by proline under stress in plants. *Current Science*, Vol.82, No.5, 525-532.
- Meda, A. R., Scheuermann, E. B., Prechsl, U. E., Erenoglu, B., Schaaf, G., Hayen, H., Weber, G., & von Wiren, N. (2007). Iron Acquisition by Phytosiderophores Contributes to Cadmium Tolerance. *Plant Physiology*, Vol.143, No.4, 1761-1773.
- Mijovilovich, A., Leitenmaier, B., Meyer-Klaucke, W., Kroneck, P. M. H., Gotz, B., & Kupper, H. (2009). Complexation and Toxicity of Copper in Higher Plants. II. Different Mechanisms for Copper versus Cadmium Detoxification in the Copper-Sensitive Cadmium/Zinc Hyperaccumulator *Thlaspi caerulescens* (Ganges Ecotype). *Plant Physiology*, Vol.151, No.2, 715-731.
- Mika, A., Minibayeva, F., Beckett, R., & Luthje, S. (2004). Possible functions of extracellular peroxidases in stress-induced generation and detoxification of active oxygen species. *Phytochemistry Reviews*, Vol.3, No.1, 173-193.
- Mittler, R. (2002). Oxidative stress, antioxidants and stress tolerance. *Trends in Plant Science*, Vol.7, No.9, 405-410.
- Mittler, R., Vanderauwera, S., Gollery, M., & Van Breusegem, F. (2004). Reactive oxygen gene network of plants. *Trends in Plant Science*, Vol.9, No.10, 490-498.
- Mobin, M., & Khan, N. A. (2007). Photosynthetic activity, pigment composition and antioxidative response of two mustard (*Brassica juncea*) cultivars differing in photosynthetic capacity subjected to cadmium stress. *Journal of Plant Physiology*, Vol.164, No.5, 601-610.
- Moller, I. M. (2001). Plant mitochondria and oxidative stress: Electron transport, NADPH turnover, and metabolism of reactive oxygen species. *Annual Review of Plant Physiology and Plant Molecular Biology*, Vol.52, 561-591.
- Moller, I. M., Jensen, P. E., & Hansson, A. (2007). Oxidative modifications to cellular components in plants. *Annual Review of Plant Biology*, Vol.58, 459-481.
- Navari-Izzo, F., Quartacci, M. F., & Sgherri, C. (2002). Lipoic acid: a unique antioxidant in the detoxification of activated oxygen species. *Plant Physiology and Biochemistry*, Vol.40, No.6-8, 463-470.
- Nery, D. d. C. M., da Silva, C. G., Mariani, D., Fernandes, P. N., Pereira, M. D., Panek, A. D., & Eleutherio, E. C. A. (2008). The role of trehalose and its transporter in protection against reactive oxygen species. *Biochim Biophys Acta*, Vol.1780, No.12, 1408-1411.

- Noctor, G., & Foyer, C. H. (1998). Ascorbate and glutathione: Keeping active oxygen under control. *Annual Review of Plant Physiology and Plant Molecular Biology*, Vol.49, 249-279.
- Nouairi, I., Ben Ammar, W., Ben Youssef, N., Ben Miled, D. D., Ghorbal, M., & Zarrouk, M. (2009). Antioxidant defense system in leaves of Indian mustard (*Brassica juncea*) and rape (*Brassica napus*) under cadmium stress. *Acta Physiologiae Plantarum*, Vol.31, No.2, 237-247.
- Oven, M., Page, J. E., Zenk, M. H., & Kutchan, T. M. (2002). Molecular characterization of the homo-phytochelatase synthase of soybean *Glycine max* - Relation to phytochelatase synthase. *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, Vol.277, No.7, 4747-4754.
- Palma, J. M., Sandalio, L. M., Corpas, F. J., Romero-Puertas, M. C., McCarthy, I., & del Rio, L. A. (2002). Plant proteases, protein degradation, and oxidative stress: role of peroxisomes. *Plant Physiology and Biochemistry*, Vol.40, No.6-8, 521-530.
- Panfili, F., Schneider, A., Vives, A., Perrot, F., Hubert, P., & Pellerin, S. (2009). Cadmium uptake by durum wheat in presence of citrate. *Plant and Soil*, Vol.316, No.1, 299-309.
- Passardi, F., Cosio, C., Penel, C., & Dunand, C. (2005). Peroxidases have more functions than a Swiss army knife. *Plant Cell Reports*, Vol.24, No.5, 255-265.
- Peng, H. Y., Yang, X. E., Yang, M. J., & Tian, S. K. (2006). Responses of antioxidant enzyme system to copper toxicity and copper detoxification in the leaves of *Elsholtzia splendens*. *Journal of Plant Nutrition*, Vol.29, No.9, 1619-1635.
- Pinheiro, C., Passarinho, J. A., & Ricardo, C. P. (2004). Effect of drought and rewatering on the metabolism of *Lupinus albus* organs. *Journal of Plant Physiology*, Vol.161, No.11, 1203-1210.
- Pinto, A. P., Alves, A. S., Candeias, A. J., Cardoso, A. I., de Varennes, A., Martins, L. L., Mourato, M. P., Goncalves, M. L. S., & Mota, A. M. (2009). Cadmium accumulation and antioxidative defences in *Brassica juncea* L. Czern, *Nicotiana tabacum* L. and *Solanum nigrum* L. *International Journal of Environmental Analytical Chemistry*, Vol.89, No.8-12, 661-676.
- Potters, G., De Gara, L., Asard, H., & Horemans, N. (2002). Ascorbate and glutathione: guardians of the cell cycle, partners in crime? *Plant Physiology and Biochemistry*, Vol.40, No.6-8, 537-548.
- Prasad, M. N. V. (2004). *Heavy Metal Stress in Plants*: Springer.
- Rhoads, D. M., Umbach, A. L., Subbaiah, C. C., & Siedow, J. N. (2006). Mitochondrial reactive oxygen species. Contribution to oxidative stress and interorganellar signaling. *Plant Physiology*, Vol.141, No.2, 357-366.
- Rizhsky, L., Liang, H. J., & Mittler, R. (2003). The water-water cycle is essential for chloroplast protection in the absence of stress. *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, Vol.278, No.40, 38921-38925.
- Sánchez, M. L. (2008). *Causes And Effects Of Heavy Metal Pollution*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.
- Schat, H., Sharma, S. S., & Vooijs, R. (1997). Heavy metal-induced accumulation of free proline in a metal-tolerant and a nontolerant ecotype of *Silene vulgaris*. *Physiologia Plantarum*, Vol.101, No.3, 477-482.
- Schröder, P., Herzig, R., Bojinov, B., Ruttens, A., Nehnevajova, E., Stamatiadis, S., Memon, A., Vassilev, A., Caviezel, M., & Vangronsveld, J. (2008). Bioenergy to save the world. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, Vol.15, No.3, 196-204.
- Sharma, S. S., & Dietz, K.-J. (2009). The relationship between metal toxicity and cellular redox imbalance. *Trends in Plant Science*, Vol.14, No.1, 43-50.

- Sharma, S. S., & Dietz, K. J. (2006). The significance of amino acids and amino acid-derived molecules in plant responses and adaptation to heavy metal stress. *Journal of Experimental Botany*, Vol.57, No.4, 711-726.
- Shi, G. R., Cai, Q. S., Liu, Q. Q., & Wu, L. (2009). Salicylic acid-mediated alleviation of cadmium toxicity in hemp plants in relation to cadmium uptake, photosynthesis, and antioxidant enzymes. *Acta Physiologiae Plantarum*, Vol.31, No.5, 969-977.
- Shigeoka, S., Ishikawa, T., Tamoi, M., Miyagawa, Y., Takeda, T., Yabuta, Y., & Yoshimura, K. (2002). Regulation and function of ascorbate peroxidase isoenzymes. *Journal of Experimental Botany*, Vol.53, No.372, 1305-1319.
- Smeets, K., Ruytinx, J., Semane, B., Van Belleghem, F., Remans, T., Van Sanden, S., Vangronsveld, J., & Cuypers, A. (2008). Cadmium-induced transcriptional and enzymatic alterations related to oxidative stress. *Environmental and Experimental Botany*, Vol.63, No.1-3, 1-8.
- Stephan, U. W., & Scholz, G. (1993). Nicotianamine - Mediator of Transport of Iron and Heavy-Metals in the Phloem. *Physiologia Plantarum*, Vol.88, No.3, 522-529.
- Taiz, L., & Zeiger, E. (2002). *Plant Physiology* (3rd ed.). Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates, Inc.
- Timperio, A. M., Egidi, M. G., & Zolla, L. (2008). Proteomics applied on plant abiotic stresses: Role of heat shock proteins (HSP). *Journal of Proteomics*, Vol.71, No.4, 391-411.
- Tuteja, N., Singh, M. B., Misra, M. K., Bhalla, P. L., & Tuteja, R. (2001). Molecular mechanisms of DNA damage and repair: Progress in plants. *Critical Reviews in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology*, Vol.36, No.4, 337-397.
- Van den Ende, W., & Valluru, R. (2009). Sucrose, sucrosyl oligosaccharides, and oxidative stress: scavenging and salvaging? *Journal of Experimental Botany*, Vol.60, No.1, 9-18.
- Vangronsveld, J., & Clijsters, H. (1994). Toxic effects of metals. In M. E. Farago (Ed.), *Plants and the chemical elements. Biochemistry, uptake, tolerance and toxicity* (pp. 149-177). Weinheim: VCH Verlagsgesellschaft.
- Vázquez, S., Goldsbrough, P., & Carpena, R. O. (2009). Comparative analysis of the contribution of phytochelatins to cadmium and arsenic tolerance in soybean and white lupin. *Plant Physiology and Biochemistry*, Vol.47, No.1, 63-67.
- Vranova, E., Inze, D., & Van Breusegem, F. (2002). Signal transduction during oxidative stress. *Journal of Experimental Botany*, Vol.53, No.372, 1227-1236.
- Wingler, A. (2002). The function of trehalose biosynthesis in plants. *Phytochemistry*, Vol.60, No.5, 437-440.
- Zhang, F.-L., Niu, B., Wang, Y.-C., Chen, F., Wang, S.-H., Xu, Y., Jiang, L.-D., Gao, S., Wu, J., Tang, L., & Jia, Y.-J. (2008). A novel betaine aldehyde dehydrogenase gene from *Jatropha curcas*, encoding an enzyme implicated in adaptation to environmental stress. *Plant Science*, Vol.174, No.5, 510-518.
- Zhang, Z. C., Gao, X., & Qiu, B. S. (2008). Detection of phytochelatins in the hyperaccumulator *Sedum alfredii* exposed to cadmium and lead. *Phytochemistry*, Vol.69, No.4, 911-918.
- Zhao, F.-J., & McGrath, S. P. (2009). Biofortification and phytoremediation. *Current Opinion in Plant Biology*, Vol.12, No.3, 373-380.
- Zorrig, W., Rouached, A., Shahzad, Z., Abdelly, C., Davidian, J.-C., & Berthomieu, P. (2010). Identification of three relationships linking cadmium accumulation to cadmium tolerance and zinc and citrate accumulation in lettuce. *Journal of Plant Physiology*, Vol.167, No.15, 1239-1247.



### **Advances in Selected Plant Physiology Aspects**

Edited by Dr. Giuseppe Montanaro

ISBN 978-953-51-0557-2

Hard cover, 388 pages

**Publisher** InTech

**Published online** 25, April, 2012

**Published in print edition** April, 2012

The book provides general principles and new insights of some plant physiology aspects covering abiotic stress, plant water relations, mineral nutrition and reproduction. Plant response to reduced water availability and other abiotic stress (e.g. metals) have been analysed through changes in water absorption and transport mechanisms, as well as by molecular and genetic approach. A relatively new aspects of fruit nutrition are presented in order to provide the basis for the improvement of some fruit quality traits. The involvement of hormones, nutritional and proteomic plant profiles together with some structure/function of sexual components have also been addressed. Written by leading scientists from around the world it may serve as source of methods, theories, ideas and tools for students, researchers and experts in that areas of plant physiology.

#### **How to reference**

In order to correctly reference this scholarly work, feel free to copy and paste the following:

Miguel Mourato, Rafaela Reis and Luisa Louro Martins (2012). Characterization of Plant Antioxidative System in Response to Abiotic Stresses: A Focus on Heavy Metal Toxicity, *Advances in Selected Plant Physiology Aspects*, Dr. Giuseppe Montanaro (Ed.), ISBN: 978-953-51-0557-2, InTech, Available from: <http://www.intechopen.com/books/advances-in-selected-plant-physiology-aspects/characterization-of-plant-antioxidative-system-in-response-to-abiotic-stresses-a-focus-on-heavy-met>

**INTECH**  
open science | open minds

#### **InTech Europe**

University Campus STeP Ri  
Slavka Krautzeka 83/A  
51000 Rijeka, Croatia  
Phone: +385 (51) 770 447  
Fax: +385 (51) 686 166  
[www.intechopen.com](http://www.intechopen.com)

#### **InTech China**

Unit 405, Office Block, Hotel Equatorial Shanghai  
No.65, Yan An Road (West), Shanghai, 200040, China  
中国上海市延安西路65号上海国际贵都大饭店办公楼405单元  
Phone: +86-21-62489820  
Fax: +86-21-62489821

© 2012 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

IntechOpen

IntechOpen